

and Compensation Act expired. Specifically, the authorization of the 9/11 health program—one of the two critical programs in the Zadroga act—came to an end last night and will have to start winding down. Thankfully, Dr. Howard and his team, who run the program, have responsibly managed their funding, so they can continue to support health services and benefits for several months on into the future, perhaps another year.

To be clear, our brave heroes are still able to get health care from this program today. That fact, however, should diminish in no way our responsibility in Congress to reauthorize the program as quickly as possible and permanently—forever. In truth, it is a black mark on a Congress that the program was ever allowed to expire, regardless of its ability to continue operations in the short term.

The firefighters, police men and women, construction workers, and first responders from 9/11—many of them injured, many of them sick—traveled to Washington a few weeks ago to lobby Congress, to petition their representatives and their government to continue supporting basic health services they need to treat cancers, respiratory ailments, and other illnesses directly linked to 9/11.

I wish to thank my colleague from New York, Senator GILLIBRAND, for her valued work on this issue. It has been a passion for her. She took the torch Hillary Clinton first lit when she was here as Senator and has run with it hard and well. I am proud to be her partner in trying to make sure that Zadroga, in both its parts, is extended permanently.

People would think it would be easy to get this done considering all the legislators who say they will never forget, who make promises each anniversary to honor the heroes of 9/11. We should not need them to walk the Halls of Congress to win support for basic services for those who walked undaunted through dust, fire, rubble, and ash, who risked their lives to save their fellow citizens. The first responders who ran to the smoldering towers on 9/11 are just like our veterans—they volunteered and risked their lives for our safety. These folks didn't have to do this. They volunteered. They knew the dangers, but they care about our safety. We should not forget them.

But their voices and the impassioned advocacy of folks like John Feal and Jon Stewart have had a real impact. On September 16, when these first responders visited Congress, the majority leader graciously said he would meet with them personally and said: "We do plan to extend the program and the committees . . . in the House and the Senate are actually working on the details now." It was a real breakthrough.

The first responders who pled their case, the advocates who supported them each step of the way, and champions in Congress such as Senator GILLIBRAND here and Representatives

NADLER and MALONEY in the House, who passionately led the fight for this bill for years now, deserve much of the credit. They are the reason we have so many cosponsors—56 here in the Senate, including 12 Republicans. I wish to thank the Presiding Officer for being one of those recent cosponsors.

That is why I was so troubled to hear earlier this week, when again asked if the Senate would consider the extension of the Zadroga act before the deadline, the majority leader said he would "have to check and get back on that."

When the towers were hit, the firefighters and the EMS workers and cops who rushed into those burning buildings did not stop and say "I have to check on that and get back to you." When the towers came down and there was a hellhole of twisted steel and smoldering plasterboard, with our brothers and sisters trapped within, the smell of burning flesh still in the air—I was there; I vividly remember it—and thousands with anguished faces holding signs that said "Did you see my mother, Mary? Have you seen my brother, Bob?" because people didn't know where people were—maybe they were still alive but trapped in the smoldering towers—the first responders so bravely rushed in to see if they could save any lives. They did not say "I have to check on that and get back to you." No, they rushed right to the towers. They rushed in even before they were asked. They did their duty. They did more than their duty. Many died. Many more are suffering. We don't need to check on things and get back to them. We need to write the check to fund their health care for the injuries they sustained in selfless service to their Nation when we were under attack by a foreign enemy. Period. End of story.

So what changed so much over the course of 2 weeks? When the first responders were here in DC, the majority leader committed to passing the legislation they need and so richly deserve for their heroism. A few weeks later, when the eyes of the world aren't watching quite so closely, he said: I will have to check and get back.

I would plead with the majority leader to help move this legislation forward and move it forward quickly. Let's not have to have these first responders, many of whom have all kinds of cancers they acquired on those fatal days after 9/11, come back here again and again. Let the doctors who are bravely working for the program not have to worry whether they will have a job. And let the program itself, which has been done without an iota of fraud—all the claims of "Let's do it for 5 years because we are not sure it will work"—those are the things we negotiated, Senator GILLIBRAND and I with Senator Coburn—those worries are gone. It is working exquisitely well, and there has not been an iota of fraud or misspent money.

So we shouldn't have to check on it; we should just move forward. I plead,

plead, plead with our majority leader, who was genuinely moved by the first responders when he met them, to make sure the bill moves forward. And let me say the same to the new leaders—whoever they may become—in the new House, in the new elections that are coming.

We cannot leave these heroes in limbo. We cannot leave them wondering if their health program, now expired, will be there for them if and when they get sick. As John Stewart said so well, cancer doesn't expire.

I only ask one thing this morning—one thing: that the majority leader and the Speaker honor their commitments to put this bill on the floor of both Houses. I implore them to move quickly to pass the Zadroga 9/11 health reauthorization act.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. FISCHER). Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

#### MILITARY CONSTRUCTION, THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS, AND RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2016—MOTION TO PROCEED

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of the motion to proceed to H.R. 2029, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

Motion to proceed to Calendar No. 98, H.R. 2029, a bill making appropriations for military construction, the Department of Veterans Affairs, and related agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2016, and for other purposes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alaska.

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Madam President, I am here this morning to speak about the issue that is before this body, the motion to proceed to H.R. 2029, or what we refer to as the MILCON-VA appropriations bill.

I certainly intend to support closing off debate on this and moving to take up this important appropriations measure. This is important for a host of different reasons, not the least of which is that we need to get to the substance of this issue. We need to get back to a regular order process in order to advance the appropriations bills that we on the Appropriations Committee have spent a considerable amount of time and effort drafting.